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**Sent:** Thur 8/13/2015 6:41:40 PM  
**Subject:** Utah Attorney General Reyes issued statement after gold king mine spill meeting in durango

Utah Attorney General Reyes issued statement after Gold King Mine Spill meeting in Durango  
by Camille Anderson, Matt Whitlock and Kirsten Rappleye Kcsg Television

Published - 08/13/15 - 11:14 AM | 0  | 0  |  | 

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EPA is working closely with first responders and local and state officials to ensure the safety of citizens to water contaminated by the spill. The agency has activated its Emergency Operations Center to ensure coordination among its regions, laboratories and national program offices in Washington DC. (Courtesy of EPA)

[slideshow](#)

SALT LAKE CITY – Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes joined Colorado Attorney General Cynthia H. Coffman and New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas in Durango, Colo., to share information and discuss the immediate and possible long term impacts of the [Environmental Protection Agency's \(EPA\) Gold King Mine spill](#).

"One of the reasons I am in Durango is to discuss with my colleagues from Colorado and New

Mexico legal options to ensure the EPA lives up to its promise to be fully accountable and transparent – and to make our citizens and environment whole," said Utah Attorney General Reyes. "It is premature to say what legal action will be taken until we better understand the damage that has been and is occurring and also learn what the EPA is willing to compensate. In that process, we will ensure the EPA, and any other potentially liable entities, are held legally responsible not just for short term effects but for damage that may not be known or understood for years to come."

Upon notice of the disaster, a team of lawyers from the Office of the Utah Attorney General lent support to the vitally important actions of its clients including the Utah Departments of Environmental Quality and Public Safety – and their Divisions of Water Quality and Emergency Management. These agencies began immediate monitoring of impacts to Utah's waters and evaluating short and long-term health, environmental and recreational impacts to Utah citizens and tribal nations along the San Juan River.

Currently, citizens can make compensation claims directly to the EPA and the Utah Attorney General's Office will advocate for timely and fair review of such claims.

"I am here today to ensure Utah has a voice in this process - because Utah citizens need an advocate," continued General Reyes. "While I cannot represent citizens directly as a private lawyer, I can work to make sure there is a proper system to assess harms and claims."

State, county and local officials are collaborating to protect and assist Utah citizens in this emergency while attempting to get answers from the EPA and hold the agency fully accountable for its actions.

"Utah has welcomed collaboration with neighboring states to share expertise, resources, information and possibly costs moving forward. Utah, along with its sister states, is evaluating all legal options and will do everything within its power to ensure our citizens are protected and that our states are made whole for any damages caused," concluded General Reyes. "And we are supportive of an independent review of the circumstances leading to the mass release in addition to any internal review by the EPA."

The EPA stated on its website: "To assess the impacts of the release at the Gold King Mine near Silverton, Colorado, water quality samples were collected at numerous intervals beginning on Aug. 5, 2015. Samples were taken prior to the plume's arrival to establish a baseline for water quality comparisons. Each surface water sample was analyzed for 24 metals, including arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury.

"Analysis now shows that water quality for the Animas River from the Silverton, Colo. area to the Durango municipal water intake has returned to pre-event water quality levels. These results are based on validated sampling data collected from Aug. 5 to Aug. 9, 2015.

"EPA has shared this data with state, local and tribal officials in Colorado to assist them in their decisions regarding the on-going use of water resources. EPA plans to continue to monitor, analyze and share data for downstream river segments as it becomes available."

From Washington D.C., Senator Orrin Hatch said, "I'm deeply disappointed by the EPA's spill of millions of gallons of toxic waste into our water supply. As the contaminated water makes its way west into Utah, I'm highly concerned about its effects on the water upon which our agriculture, industry, recreation, and municipalities depend."

Hatch also called for change at the agency. "Going forward, I will do everything in my power to ensure that the EPA cleans up this mess and ensures that mistakes such as this don't happen again. This disaster emphasizes the need for the EPA to focus on fulfilling its existing responsibilities, instead of focusing its resources on imposing expensive new regulations that kill jobs and hurt family budgets."

According to Karry Rathje, the public information manager for the Washington County Water Conservancy District, this area does not anticipate any interruptions to water service in Washington County as a result of the San Juan River contamination caused by the Gold King Mine spill in Colorado.

"The district's water supply comes from the Virgin River watershed," Rathje said. "Water is not currently received directly from the Colorado River. The majority of the district's water is collected from the Virgin River at the Quail Creek Diversion and transported via pipeline to the county's two largest off-stream reservoirs, Quail Creek and Sand Hollow.

"Should we experience a contamination in our area, the district's system is designed to allow water from the Virgin River to bypass our system. Storage in the district's reservoirs is adequate to serve municipal demands should collection of river water be temporarily ceased for any reason."

Read more: [KCSG Television - Utah Attorney General Reyes issued statement after Gold King Mine Spill meeting in Durango](#)

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"Out of the long list of nature's gifts to man, none is perhaps so utterly essential to human life as soil."  
Hugh Hammond Bennett